CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SIXTEENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Thursday, 25 February 1999, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Rodríguez Cedeño (Venezuela)

GE.99-60768 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I wish to declare open the 816th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

(continued in French)

As you know, the representative of France to the Conference, Ambassador Joëlle Bourgois, is about to leave Geneva, having been called by her Government to other important duties. Ambassador Bourgois joined our Conference at the height of the negotiations on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, during which she articulated and defended the position of her Government with authority and elegance, in very difficult political circumstances. The profound sensitivity she displayed towards the concerns of all the members of this Conference, and her balanced approach to the priorities each of us attached to the items on our agenda, greatly helped the Conference emerge from the deadlock in which it found itself last year, and justly earned her respect from us all. So, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf I would like to wish the Ambassador every success in her new duties and happiness in her private life.

(continued in Spanish)

I should now like to announce the list of speakers for today: the representatives of Austria, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Switzerland, Bulgaria and France. I should like now to call on the representative of Austria, Ambassador Kreid.

Mr. KREID (Austria): Mr. President, we are delighted to see you in the Chair of this Conference and hope you will enjoy your tenure. Let me also express our gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Grey, who has spared no efforts to advance our common cause but regrettably had to leave more work for you than, I dare say, he would have liked.

To the newcomers to this Conference we address our most cordial welcome. We hope that their unobstructed fresh view will be beneficial for our work. Those who are about to leave or have left Geneva, Ambassador Bourgois and Ambassador Campbell, should know that they will be warmly remembered by myself and my delegation. Our best wishes accompany them.

Between 1987 and the mid-1990s the radically transformed international security environment has produced quite a number of impressive results such as the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, START I and II, the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CWC), the indefinite extension of the NPT and the CTBT. Since then, disarmament efforts seem to have been running out of steam. Worse, concern is being voiced increasingly that the intricately woven fabric of disarmament treaties might unravel, putting at risk some of the pillars of the international security architecture like the Non-Proliferation or the ABM Treaties.

If there has been widespread hope that one of the benefits of the end of the cold war would be a world free from nuclear weapons, we have now come to

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understand that the "nuclear peace dividend" is not an automatic by-product of East-West détente but that further sustained efforts are needed to make it a reality. Progress should still be feasible if the conviction gains ground that nuclear weapons are ill-suited to cope with the new security challenges. In an age of rapid advances in conventional arms technology, characterized by the use of precision delivery systems, electronic data collection, satellite surveillance etc., nuclear weapons should be recognized as dispensable, a burden rather than an asset.

Therefore, we feel strongly motivated in persisting in our efforts to advance the cause of nuclear disarmament in all possible forms. The CD is, we well know, the supreme multilateral body for disarmament negotiations. But it is more. The fact that we have regular sessions even when no negotiation is going on proves that this is a suitable forum to voice concerns, announce intentions and formulate demands in matters of disarmament. There is an impressive amount of expert knowledge and diplomatic skills concentrated in this room, and time and again our deliberations, which approach the subject matter from different, even opposing, viewpoints, have produced new and valuable insights and helped to clarify and develop national positions in no insignificant way.

This is to say even when we are not negotiating, our deliberations in the CD can be meaningful. It is precisely for this reason that a growing number of countries belonging to various groups have come to the conclusion that we should provide for a body dealing with questions of nuclear disarmament. In the face of the risk of slipping backwards, rather than keeping up the momentum of the immediate post-cold-war years, Austria finds itself among those countries which would like to see the nuclear disarmament agenda more firmly anchored in our work.

In our statement of 30 July 1998 addressed to this Conference I said: "We advocate the establishment of a mechanism which permits keeping the issue of general nuclear disarmament under constant and systematic review in the CD. An essential function of such a mechanism would be to prepare the ground for further clearly circumscribed areas of multilateral negotiations." We used the expression "mechanism" intentionally in order not to prejudge the final decision of the Conference because we believe that this crucial but delicate question needs to be handled with an open mind and with flexibility. The overriding purpose of this mechanism would be to enhance transparency and to build confidence between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States, thereby paving the way for future multilateral negotiations on concrete issues.

The risk of nuclear confrontation between rival powers has diminished, but not completely disappeared, as events in South Asia have recently shown. We are still faced with acute risks connected to the possession of nuclear weapons such as their accidental use and, above all, their continued proliferation. Some worrying gaps in the global network of nuclear safeguards represent a considerable safety risk. We are aware that various efforts are undertaken by nuclear-weapon States in the area of the protection of vulnerable sites. As an example I should like to mention the Nuclear Material

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Protection, Control and Accounting Programme between Russia and the United States, which has turned out to be one of the largest and most expensive arms control initiatives of recent times. Particularly significant in this context is the Mayak plutonium storage facility under construction in Chelyabinsk.

Our knowledge of the quality of physical protection in nuclear-weapon States is, however, incomplete and insufficient. Out of a total quantity of fissile material of weapons-grade quality, which is estimated at roughly 2,000 tons, almost 1,400 tons constitute so-called "transitional material", in other words, declared or undeclared excess material. Less than 10 per cent of this material is under safeguards. These figures alone point to the magnitude and urgency of the question of safeguards and controls of existing stocks, which cannot simply be ignored by the international community.

If and to what extent excess fissile material usable in weapons can be dealt with in the negotiations on a fissile material treaty remains to be seen. The problem will not simply go away by ignoring it. A multilateral approach to these questions might have the merit that the international community will assume responsibilities in an area where unilateral efforts might be insufficient, if only because the necessary funds are not available.

Last year, when we found ourselves, during a few weeks, in the privileged position of meeting in an Ad Hoc Committee with a complicated name but entrusted with the task of preparing a treaty on fissile material, Austria made two statements in which we addressed some of the questions related to an FMCT negotiation such as scope and verification. It would be redundant to repeat these arguments, especially at a moment when we are again left in suspense as to when we will be able to take up our work again.

We are still in the initial phase of our 1999 session, but it is hard not to succumb to the strong feeling of déja vu. Are we to repeat the process of last year in a cyclical motion, re-enacting the drama - or trauma - of our inability to come to a meaningful negotiation?

Ours is, indeed, a baffling situation. No arguments to invalidate decision CD/1547 of 12 August 1998 have been advanced. There is no discernible disagreement concerning the negotiation of a fissile material treaty. All proposals for a work programme include the re-establishment of this Ad Hoc Committee. This is good news, but it does not help us for the time being because we are entangled in a well-known network called linkages. These linkages were not present when the United Nations General Assembly adopted its consensus resolution on an FMCT last December. We refuse to believe that linkages are in our interest. We refuse to believe that we cannot reach a rapid and viable compromise. We therefore appeal to you, Mr. President, to do all that is needed in order to bring us back on a course of constructive cooperation.

The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 was a forward-looking instrument at the time when it was negotiated. Its main purpose was to guarantee the peaceful use of outer space. In the meantime momentous developments have taken place

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and outer space has been transformed - mainly as a consequence of the cold war - into a heavily militarized zone. Today, military satellites have become an indispensable means for the control of terrestrial movements and installations and have played a critical role in military actions of the recent past.

The question of whether this constitutes a "peaceful" use according to the terms of the Outer Space Treaty has remained without a definite answer. One has thus come to comply with the de facto situation accepting as "peaceful" a use which, even if it serves military purposes, is in itself non-aggressive. This factual acquiescence makes sense in so far as observation satellites are going to be indispensable for peacekeeping objectives and the verification of arms control treaties. Add to this the fact that the rapid progress in technology has all but obliterated the difference between civil and military satellites. Today, many countries employ satellites which in technical terms are so similar to military reconnaissance satellites that they might also be used for military surveillance purposes.

At this juncture, we would be well advised to recognize the increased risk of conflict inherent in the proliferation of high-technology weapons with considerable aggressive potential if directed against terrestrial or space-based targets. We are therefore convinced of the need to address these issues linked with the risk of weaponization of outer space in the CD in a coherent manner and review those gaps and loopholes in existing legal instruments that need to be closed in order to preclude the possibility of military conflicts in, or including, outer space. It is our strong belief that this issue cannot be further postponed. The option to run programmes for using or even testing weapons systems in outer space must be excluded before they have reached the stage where it gets difficult to stop them.

In accordance with resolution 53/76 of the fifty-third United Nations General Assembly, adopted without a negative vote, we call upon the CD to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space as soon as possible. We welcome the systematic preparatory work by last year's Special Coordinator, Ambassador Palihakkara of Sri Lanka, and urge the members of the Conference to finalize the examination of the mandate to be proposed.

With regard to conventional arms control, the accumulation and uncontrolled circulation of small arms has given rise to a mounting expression of concern by governments and civil society. Countless are the victims, mostly amongst civilians, who have suffered or are still suffering every day under the impact of the destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons. Small arms and light weapons are the real killers nowadays. Of the 49 conflicts fought in the early 1990s, 46 were fought with small arms only. Their disastrous legacy effectively blocks rehabilitation in a post-conflict situation, hampers economic and social progress and puts international peace and stability at stake.

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In order to come to grips with this very complex situation, due to both unrestrained supply and demand, the international community is facing a new and complex challenge. Painstaking efforts are needed. Yet we are confident that progress is feasible. It is, first of all, necessary to carry on and speed up the work already in progress. A whole range of national and regional initiatives, seminars and workshops organized by governments, international organizations and NGOs alike demonstrate the importance attributed to the issue. This international movement of raising awareness has culminated so far in the adoption of United Nations General Assembly resolutions 53/77 T on illicit traffic in small arms and 53/77 E on small arms. Let me also mention the good work done by the United Nations Secretary-General's second Panel of Governmental Experts, chaired by Ambassador Donowaki of Japan, which is currently meeting again in Geneva. Their recommendation will be of particular importance with regard to the preparation of the international conference which was called for by the last General Assembly to be held not later than 2001 to address international concerns in this area.

Further coordinated actions are clearly required at the international level. No fast or ready-made solution and certainly no quick fix is in sight. In our view the focus of our attention should be threefold.

First: addressing the threat caused by illicit arms trading in all its aspects through appropriate measures at the national, regional and international levels. It will therefore be crucial to establish at the international level a conceptual and methodological platform from which to develop further a common understanding and a concerted approach. Work is already going on in several forums. Here I am referring to OAS and OSCE, as well as the negotiations following the recommendation of the United Nations Crime Prevention Commission on a protocol against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, ammunition and other related materials. Work in this field will, in our view, also have to include necessary restrictions with regard to the supply of specific categories of small arms and light weapons to recipients other than governments.

Second: efficient legal, administrative and practical measures taken at the national and regional levels in order to strengthen controls on the legal arms trade. This is all the more important as we are dealing with weapons which are relatively widespread as they are easy and cheap to produce. Arms-supplying countries, producers as well as transit countries, must recognize their particular responsibility and should be determined to follow high common standards for the management of, and restraint in, conventional arms transfers. Presently there exist some 300 producers of small arms in around 50 different countries. Should one country cease its exports, substitutes are easily available. Or to put it differently: one country's virtue can and will be another country's profit unless the motives of profit are subordinated to humanitarian ones.

Third: determined action in the field in order to assist victims to redress critical situations and to create the conditions for sustainable peace and socio-economic development. These measures include the demobilization and disarming of combatants, weapons collection, their safe storage and

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destruction as well as reintegration incentives and re-establishment of a local culture of peace. Governments have to rethink their arms exports policies and should also take the small arms problem into account with regard to their bilateral development cooperation. The challenge exists for multilateral donor organizations, too, especially the international financial institutions, which are increasingly paying attention to these aspects in their lending policies Only an integrated approach promises to be successful in the long run. Otherwise, the "peace dividend" will remain an illusion and will never be collected.

The European Union has already started to address these issues in a systematic manner. In June 1997 the EU adopted a Programme for Preventing and Combating Illicit Trafficking in Conventional Arms designed to address the problem of illicit trafficking in conventional arms. It provides for enhanced law enforcement cooperation and information exchange as well as assistance to other countries in preventing and combating the illicit trafficking of arms.

In June 1998 the EU adopted the Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, which addresses the problem of ethical and political standards to be applied to legal arms transfers.

These two major instruments, which are politically binding, do not specifically address the problem of accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons as such. The European Union has therefore adopted, as one of the last and most significant measures under the Austrian presidency on 17 December 1998, a Joint Action on combating the destabilizing accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons.

With this instrument, the European Union commits itself to build consensus in the relevant regional and international forums, in particular the United Nations and OSCE, and among affected States in the fight against the destabilizing proliferation of small arms.

The Joint Action provides for financial and technical assistance to specific programmes and projects in affected countries, including by the United Nations other international organizations, ICRC and by NGOs. Such EU funding would apply inter alia to assistance for weapons collection, security sector reform and demobilization and reintegration, as well as specific victim assistance programmes. The disbursement of such funds by the European Union will, however, be conditional on the recipient's commitment to preventing the destabilizing accumulation of small arms.

So far the CD has stayed clear of these questions. Yet it appears legitimate to ask why our efforts on transparency in armaments exclude small arms. Why couldn't we draw inspiration from the EU's approach and look at the possibility of a code of conduct on arms transfers, including small arms? With these ideas in mind, we support the continuation of the CD's work on TIA, be it in the form of a Special Coordinator or an ad hoc committee. While we support a thorough review of the United Nations's Register on Conventional Arms, we also lend our voice to addressing the issue of small arms in a

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systematic fashion in the CD. We feel that the time has come to show that the CD can contribute to a matter which is of general concern and where an international standard is urgently needed.

Next Monday, on 1 March, the Ottawa Convention on the Total Ban of Anti-Personnel Mines will enter into force. Faster than any comparable international treaty, the Ottawa Convention has reached the required threshold of 40 ratifications. Today, 133 States are signatories and 64 have already concluded their national ratification process. Not only those impressive numbers, but also what has been achieved over the last months in combating the global anti-personnel mines crisis, testifies to the significance and success of this Convention. And the momentum towards increased international cooperation and universalization will become manifest again at the First Meeting of States Parties in Maputo, where Austria hopes to see States parties, signatories and non-signatories alike.

What are the implications of those developments for our work at the CD? Certainly there is no need to renegotiate such a comprehensive instrument of international law as the Ottawa Convention. Negotiation of a free-standing new legal instrument dealing exclusively with a transfer ban, even in a fully compatible way with the provisions of the Ottawa Convention, would raise a number of political and legal problems, such as lack of global vocation, setting a precedent by negotiating a partial ban after a clear majority of States has signed a comprehensive one, proliferation of legal instruments dealing with the same content, just to name a few.

I do not say this to disparage the idea of transforming the unilateral export ban decisions taken by most remaining anti-personnel mines producers into an obligation binding under international law. I see the merit of such a concept, but the adequate legal framework for it exists already. The amended Protocol II of the CCWC contains a qualified transfer ban. What would be more logical than to broaden this provision in the course of the CCWC review process?

Before concluding, let me refer to an item of unfinished business that we should be able to solve without further delay, namely, the next step in our phased process of expansion suggested by Special Coordinator Ambassador Hofer, to which we lend our full support. We therefore hope that we will soon be able to welcome Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia in our midst.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Austria for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Majoor.

Mr. MAJOOR (Netherlands): Mr. President, since it is the first time during your tenure that I take the floor, I should like to express the great satisfaction of my delegation and myself to see you at the helm of the CD. With your experience and skill I hope and expect you to be able to move the CD towards substantive work. I should also like to take this opportunity to

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thank the Secretary-General of the CD, Vladimir Petrovsky, his deputy, Abdelkader Bensmail, and all other members of the CD secretariat for their invaluable support to us and for their unflagging enthusiasm for the cause of disarmament and non-proliferation. I also warmly welcome our new colleagues from Colombia, Argentina, Slovakia, Sweden and Indonesia. I hope that they will have a productive stay in terms of tangible work and substantive achievements in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation.

The subject of my intervention today is nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation; the immediate cause for my intervention is the dilatory way in which we so far address these issues; and the purpose is to give a modest contribution in trying to move the debate forward.

Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation remain cornerstones of the global international security structure and a priority on the global disarmament agenda. The objectives, as set out in the Non-Proliferation Treaty and in the "Principles and objectives" of 1995, have not yet been reached. Upon all of us rests the duty to try to achieve in every possible way the ultimate goal that we have set ourselves: a world free of nuclear weapons. This objective cannot be reached at one stroke, but should be realized in a series of well-considered steps. And even a world free of nuclear weapons does not by itself mean a world in peace! For that to become a reality much more needs to be done in parallel. For the world to be secure it needs to be - verifiably - free of all weapons of mass destruction. In this context, the Netherlands is honoured to host OPCW and would welcome also the Organization for the Prohibition of Biological Weapons to The Hague. For the world to be safe all States need to be at the lowest possible level of conventional armaments; and most importantly, there needs to be trust, confidence and openness at all levels within countries, between countries, in regions and in the world as a whole, as well as respect for international norms and democratic values.

The challenge is to work on all those aspects of security in parallel, without keeping one hostage to the other; to work on them in the CD, but not necessarily only there. We need to assess carefully all the time where and how we best can move forward on each of the subjects at hand or aspects thereof. Discussions and - where applicable - negotiations in the relevant multilateral forums, in regional contexts and at the bi- or plurilateral level should complement and reinforce each other and not hinder or block.

For 42 months now we have been trying to move the CD to substantive work. And although I sense considerable flexibility on all sides of this room, the various pieces simply do not want to fall into place. The CD is rapidly losing credibility; at a time when opportunities for and challenges to disarmament and non-proliferation take turns, the CD must be at the centre of international efforts to keep the international community on the right track and to steer it to new imaginative approaches to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. The CD cannot sit by idly. If a work programme is so difficult to agree upon, why do we not apply the same approach as we do with respect to the agenda of the CD? If there is no agreement on a new work programme in the first four weeks of the CD's annual session, we should simply

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decide to adopt the work programme of the previous year, on the explicit understanding that each subject can be brought up and changes and additions can be agreed upon in the course of the CD sessions. If it is generally accepted that Special Coordinators are an effective mechanism to develop common understanding, why do we not give the CD President discretionary powers to nominate a Special Coordinator with a simple standard mandate, when he needs help in the search for common ground on how to proceed on a particular subject in the CD? Not every procedural decision aiming at facilitating the search for consensus should have to be taken by consensus.

On 13 August last year the CD finally decided to start negotiations on a fissile material treaty that would prohibit the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices. That decision was taken more than three years after the "Principles and objectives" were agreed in the Review and Extension Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, three years also after the Shannon report and the mandate contained therein were approved in the CD. The joy was great: the CD had broken out of its impasse; finally it would do what it is supposed to do, namely, treaty negotiations. It even managed to agree on a very competent chairman for the first part of the negotiations, Ambassador Moher. All was set. We are now 197 days later, a little over half a year, and still we have not started.

We join those countries that do wish the fissile material treaty negotiations to start without further delay. While the CTBT is widely seen as the qualitative end of the nuclear arms race, a prohibition on the production of fissile material can be seen as the quantitative end thereof, in the sense that it will cap the amount of fissile material available for military purposes worldwide. We see that as an important further step towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. We regard it as a significant multilateral endeavour, in which nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States together try to diminish nuclear danger by agreeing on a production ban and on an international verification regime. The treaty would engage non-parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in a crucial undertaking in the field of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, including its verification arrangements. And finally, it would extend the safeguards system to materials and facilities in the nuclear-weapon States, whereas now safeguard arrangements with these States are on a voluntary basis. We regard, in sum, a fissile material treaty as an important strengthening of the non-proliferation regime and a meaningful and necessary step on the road to complete nuclear disarmament.

The Netherlands will take a constructive approach to the negotiations and will develop its detailed position as the negotiating process goes along. We do not want to fix our views prematurely in order to keep the necessary flexibility. As general policy guidelines we believe: that the prohibition of the production of fissile material for explosive purposes requires effective and at the same time cost-effective international verification, with IAEA in a pivotal role; that a fissile material treaty must be of a universal and non-discriminatory nature and encompass all countries, including the nuclear-weapon States and the non-parties to the NPT; and that the fissile material treaty is only one further step towards nuclear disarmament, in which not all concerns with respect to fissile material can be met at the same time.

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Although my country does understand the wish to discuss existing stocks of fissile material, we would favour efforts to negotiate first a treaty on the prohibition of future production. We favour that because we are convinced that only such an approach can lead to timely results. At the same time we should encourage nuclear-weapon States to put under safeguards their excess nuclear material resulting from nuclear reduction programmes. In this context we welcome the Trilateral Initiative by the United States, the Russian Federation and the IAEA on fissile material that is no longer required for defence purposes and the ongoing effort of developing a model verification agreement. These are essential measures that should ensure that these materials cannot be returned to nuclear weapons programmes, guaranteeing the irreversibility of this process. We fully agree with the Norwegian State Secretary when she said last week that excess material that is removed from the military production cycle should no longer have the status of military non-verifiable material, but gradually be made subject to a transparent, non-military and civilian regime subject to international verification. It could be part of a separate framework, in which measures can be discussed that enhance transparency and confidence in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

The prohibition on the production of fissile material should be verified internationally and effectively, including a mechanism that covers undeclared facilities. Many delegations expressed the view that a verification regime should focus on enrichment and reprocessing plants, since these are the essential production facilities for weapons-usable fissile material. This focused approach would also be the most cost-effective one. My delegation agrees with that but would, on the other hand, not exclude a wider approach. We believe that we should have a closer look not only at other installations such as hot cells, but also at new verification methods that are not related to specific installations, such as wide area environmental monitoring. They might have to be included in the verification arrangements. IAEA has already gained some experience with environmental sampling and is entitled to use this method under the Additional Safeguards Protocol. In a later phase - as a part of a process of convergence of verification regimes under the NPT and the fissile material treaty - we would not exclude reactors and other installations that are capable of producing weapons-usable fissile material, both in nuclear-weapons States and non-nuclear-weapons States, to fall under one international non-discriminatory verification regime. But that is certainly beyond the scope of our present deliberations.

The negotiation of a fissile material treaty is not the only nuclear issue in the CD. There are a number of proposals from all corners that have in common that they would allow the CD to discuss nuclear disarmament in a broader context. My delegation believes that it would be useful to establish in the CD a mechanism that would allow for exchange of information and of views on nuclear disarmament. Together with Belgium, Germany, Italy and Norway, the Netherlands therefore proposed to establish in the CD a working group for that purpose. This proposal is not an end in itself: it leaves all options open for the future. But as far as we can see it is the only mechanism that could lead to a consensus on how the CD should deal with nuclear disarmament at this stage. We hope that all delegations will show

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just that amount of flexibility that would allow the CD to move forward on this issue on the basis of this proposal, that is a true attempt to capture the common ground in this body.

Coming to the end of my intervention, I would like to make three more remarks on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in a wider context.

First, we would like to express our strong support for the unilateral and bilateral undertakings in the field of nuclear weapons reductions by the United States and Russia and by France and the United Kingdom. We support the START process and fervently hope that the Duma will ratify START II without further delay, and that negotiations on a START III will soon begin, as envisaged at the summit meeting in Helsinki in 1997. Both the United States and Russia defend the bilateral approach to nuclear weapons reductions as the most effective and promising one. My delegation agrees with that, provided that the agreements reached are ratified and implemented.

Secondly, it is in all our interest that nothing is done to undermine the present nuclear disarmament efforts and the non-proliferation regime. This goes for all countries without any discrimination, members and non-members of the NPT alike. The nuclear tests in South Asia reminded us of the vulnerability of the non-proliferation regime. We call on all countries to sign and ratify the CTBT and to accede to the NPT without any preconditions; their accession to these treaties is a prerequisite on the road to nuclear disarmament. We are encouraged by the recent summit meeting between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, and regard it as a hopeful sign that both sides indicated that they would like to move away from a regional nuclear arms race.

My third and last point relates to the review process of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The second PrepCom failed for a number of reasons on which I do not want to dwell at this point. It is my Government's view that we can ill afford the third PrepCom to fail as well. We do not belong to the cynics who believe that the best products are produced by chaos. My delegation would like the 2000 NPT Review Conference to result in a forward-looking document, an adapted version of the "Principles and objectives", including a new programme of action for the five years following the 2000 Review Conference. We would also welcome - as a part of this document or as a separate document - an elaboration of how we will be undertaking the strengthened review process in the years ahead. And we expect the Conference to produce a factual report on the implementation of the Treaty and the "Principles and objectives" of 1995. We hope that the next PrepCom will be able to agree on the procedural issues that will allow the Review Conference to run smoothly. At the same time, we do expect the PrepCom to continue its substantive work by further developing common ground on elements that can be used for the final documents of the Review Conference. We believe that the Chairman's paper No. 2 provides a good basis for further work in this respect.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of the Netherlands for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Pakistan, Ambassador Akram.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference at this critical juncture. You have already displayed considerable diplomatic acumen in initiating and guiding the consultation process designed to evolve consensus on a balanced programme of work for the Conference. My delegation will continue to extend its cooperation and support to you in bringing this process to an early and successful conclusion. We are as ready, if not as anxious, as others to get down to substantive work in the CD.

I would like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States, for the expeditious way in which he accomplished the inevitable initial step of approving our annual agenda. Although Ambassador Grey did not "tilt at windmills", his forthright approach to the CD's work programme has created the basis upon which you will no doubt be able to build a broad consensus.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our Secretary-General, Mr. Petrovsky, and his able deputy, Mr. Bensmail, for the assistance extended to our delegation throughout the last year and this year.

I also wish to avail myself of this opportunity to welcome all our new colleagues in the Conference. At the same time, our joy coexists with considerable sadness because of the departure of two dear and outstanding colleagues, Ambassador Joëlle Bourgois of France and Ambassador John Campbell of Australia.

The Pakistan delegation believes that the contributions made by Ambassador Bourgois to multilateral disarmament must be acknowledged in a more permanent manner than the accolades bestowed on her at numerous farewell gatherings. Therefore, I wish to read the following into the record of the Conference on Disarmament:

"Joëlle Bourgois, the Ambassador of France,
Arrived amongst us, in an emergency, from Pretoria,
To reject the attacks on the final testing in Mururoa,
She defended, with panache, this French cause,
And then, almost without a pause,
Was authorized to announce; Perhaps through gritted teeth,
That France would be the first to support Ramaker's CTBT.

"Since then, Joëlle emerged, as the voice of Logic and Reason,
And of Nuclear Non-proliferation.
Pressing for the early start of 'Cut-off',
She even advocated;
One does not know if with great confidence,
the provision, only to NPT parties, of
Negative Security Assurance.

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"Yet, reflecting the principles of Clausewitz,
Joëlle also explained to the uninitiated, the essentials of
nuclear deterrence,
Although, to her dismay,
After the tests of May,
This thesis gained new adherence.

"Now, even as we are about to start,
Work on the Agenda she set out,
Joëlle is to depart.
She will go home,
To a Club more exclusive than our own,
To propose a multipolar solution,
To the ills created by hyper-power globalization."

Ambassador Campbell has strategically chosen this day to depart Geneva and thus is unavailable to receive our final benedictions. We have refrained from adding an ode to him because, in our traditions, the only suitable male subjects of poetry are either brutal conquerors or dead saints! But we wish Ambassador Campbell all the best.

I have asked for the floor today to offer some views on the two issues on which some course of action needs to be agreed in the Conference on Disarmament, that is, nuclear disarmament and outer space.

The Pakistan delegation has, on several occasions, especially in the United Nations General Assembly, outlined its substantive position and approach to the highest-priority goal of nuclear disarmament. We are gravely concerned at recent developments in this arena: the obvious desire of some if not all the "nuclear-weapon States" to indefinitely retain and progressively enhance their nuclear weapons capabilities; the espousal of nuclear doctrines which envisage the use, including first use, of nuclear weapons, including against non-nuclear-weapon States; the non-implementation of important arms reduction agreements between the major nuclear Powers; and the initiation of active programmes to develop "anti-missile shields" which are likely to destabilize global and regional nuclear stability and possibly escalate into a new spiral in the nuclear and missile race around the world.

These concerns need to be effectively addressed by the international community, especially the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. There is no confusion in our minds as to the work which the CD could undertake in the field of nuclear disarmament. It could, among other things: conclude - rapidly - a convention committing all States to the elimination of nuclear weapons, hopefully within a relatively short period of time; negotiate a protocol to the CTBT to monitor non-explosive nuclear testing to effectively prevent the further development and refinement of nuclear weapons; evolve an agreement involving all member States and alliance systems to firstly "de-alert" and progressively "de-couple" nuclear warheads and delivery systems, and adopt other "confidence-building" measures similar to suggestions made in the context of containing nuclear escalation in South Asia; identify other measures to halt and progressively

(Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

reverse nuclear and missile development on a global basis; and discuss and evolve an agreed programme or plan of action to make progress towards the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Pakistan delegation acknowledges that agreement to negotiate on such measures involves difficult national security issues for the nuclear-weapon Powers and their allies. But these issues are no more difficult than the ones which, for instance, Pakistan is asked to take decisions on in the context of the fissile material treaty. Therefore, we cannot accept the proposition that the Conference on Disarmament is not entitled to undertake multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament. What, then, are the negotiations on the FMT? Are they, as many of us suspect, designed only to promote non-proliferation, and not nuclear disarmament?

In this context, I must express my concern that new preconditions are being posed for nuclear disarmament - for example, what we have just heard from our distinguished colleague from the Netherlands, that accession to the CTBT, and even the NPT, "is a prerequisite on the road to nuclear disarmament." That, unfortunately, will remain a bridge too far.

The Pakistan delegation therefore fully subscribes to the proposal of the Group of 21 to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. However, we are prepared to move towards our aim of initiating nuclear disarmament negotiations in the CD in a graduated process. The "troika" mechanism has served its purpose. We should now look at the various proposals which envisage different kinds of mechanisms and mandates on nuclear disarmament and evolve agreement on an approach that is generally acceptable but also effective in addressing this item which enjoys the highest priority.

In the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, the international community made the solemn pledge that "the exploration and use of outer space ... shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development, and shall be the province of all mankind".

This "province of mankind" is today under the threat of being transformed into yet another arena for military competition and escalation with the aim of achieving the ultimate instruments for complete global domination. Self-styled "stewards for military space" are seeking to dominate the "space dimension of military operations" and of "integrating space forces into war-fighting capabilities across the full spectrum of conflict". Responsible officials belonging to a major military Power have declared categorically that "we have signed no treaty saying we would not weaponize space".

Even the Treaty which has until now had a crucial restraining effect on the otherwise irrational nuclear arms race between the two super-Powers, the ABM Treaty, faces an uncertain future. Moreover, theatre missile defences (TMD) are planned to be established nationally and in several sensitive regions of the world.

(Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

The militarization of outer space and the establishment of TMD systems have global as well as regional implications for both nuclear disarmament and further proliferation of nuclear weapons. There are at least three major areas of concern. First, the militarization of outer space which is being pursued by certain quarters will be inevitably perceived as designed to achieve global domination and thus provoke new strategic antagonisms. The absence of global rivalry among the major Powers may be replaced by new, dangerous and destabilizing confrontations.

Second, the emplacement of TMD systems, with or without integrating them with systems deployed in space, could provide one side with a quantum military advantage over potential adversaries. Their response may be to enlarge their nuclear delivery systems. Nuclear stability would be seriously eroded. Nuclear disarmament efforts would come to a standstill. It is obvious from the statements made by some important Powers that they will not view such developments with equanimity. Whether space is exploited to support the creation of defensive shields against missile attacks, or used for deployment of weapons which aim at ground targets, the fundamental strategic balances between the major Powers will be severely affected. The result will be the same - an arms race in outer space and, most likely, a new nuclear arms race on terra firma.

In this context, it is evident that the possible revision or abrogation of obligations arising from the ABM Treaty is an issue of the most immediate concern. It could impinge not only on the START process but also produce unforeseen consequences for the CTBT as well as the FMT. It will erode global confidence in the permanence of solemn commitments for nuclear and arms restraint accepted and sanctified in legally binding treaties and commitments.

Third, the legitimization of missile defence systems by one or more Powers will have serious consequences for regional security, including in South Asia, which is now nuclearized. Deployment of ballistic missiles could no doubt be destabilizing, especially in South Asia, because of short flight times and assured deliverability. Pakistan has advanced proposals to promote a "strategic restraint regime" and maintain deterrence at the lowest possible level in South Asia. However, the acquisition and deployment of missile defences by either side would destabilize deterrence and escalate reliance on offensive systems, especially missiles. Even worse, it could place a premium on a first-strike capability and doctrines designed to neutralize the vulnerability created by the adversary's missile defences.

Pakistan therefore believes that it is timely for the CD to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. The CD dealt with this issue, including in an Ad Hoc Committee, until 1994, when the creation of "linkages" prevented its re-establishment. It is time now to undo the effects of this "original" linkage. We hope that your informal consultations will enable agreement to be achieved on a suitable mandate which would enable the Ad Hoc Committee to address the various aspects of the issue to which my delegation has referred in this statement.

(Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

The Pakistan delegation will avail itself of an early opportunity to respond to a number of interesting, if controversial, statements we have heard, including today, on the fissile materials treaty whose negotiations are to commence soon in this Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Pakistan for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I now call on the representative of Switzerland, Ambassador Hofer.

Mr. HOFER (Switzerland) (translated from French): Mr. President, this is the first time my delegation has had the honour to take the floor under your presidency. On this occasion allow me to extend my congratulations to you and to pledge to you the full support of the Swiss delegation in the discharge of your duties. Bearing in mind your experience, your many high-level duties within the international community in Geneva and your knowledge of the law of nations, our Conference is certainly in good hands. I wish you every success in restarting the work of the Conference both in terms of its enlargement and in terms of substance. I also take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States, who so soundly laid the foundations for the decisions which, we hope, the CD will adopt very shortly.

On this occasion, I would also like to pay tribute to our colleague Ambassador Joëlle Bourgois, the head of the French delegation, who is attending her last meeting with us today, at least during her current term. Her contributions have greatly enlivened, inspired and enriched our work. As the representative of the host State, I should also like to thank Ambassador Bourgois for her highly appreciated professional and personal commitment in favour of the international status of Geneva, thus showing that this location is in a way our common property as diplomats and representatives to the CD. Madam Ambassador, our best wishes go with you.

Today I have the opportunity to address our Conference to convey to it a few considerations relating to the follow-up to the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. In conformity with the Final Declaration adopted in Geneva in May 1996, in the context of the Review Conference, a further review conference is scheduled to meet in 2001. It is precisely in this connection that my statement will focus and convey to you our concerns regarding the problems of projectiles and their traumatic effects. Even as I speak certain small-calibre arms systems are still producing the traumatic effect of what are known as "dumdum" bullets, causing grave bodily injury. It is true that a number of provisions of international law in the area of disarmament as well as in the humanitarian area address this very issue. Hence it is up to those responsible for international negotiations as well as experts to consider whether these provisions are still appropriate. In order to respect the spirit that inspired the drawing up of the 1980 Convention, international law will have to be adapted where necessary, taking into account current technical developments.

(Mr. Hofer, Switzerland)

It is broadly established that gaps persist and that they can be filled. To this end it is therefore desirable to establish and adopt common criteria and standards in the area of ballistics as well as in the medical and legal areas. In order to realize the aim of the Final Declaration of May 1996, my authorities organized a first international seminar on ballistics in October 1997 in Thun, near Bern, which prompted keen interest. In order to repeat this experience, Switzerland intends to hold another such event. Thus the second seminar of this kind will take place in Thun on 23 and 24 March next. One representative per State participating, in any capacity, in the Conference on Disarmament, or from among the States parties to the 1980 Convention, as well as some representatives of non-governmental organizations particularly interested in this field, will be invited to this colloquium. My authorities hope that this meeting will be in a position to constitute an appropriate platform to continue and delve further into technical debate. The aim will be, inter alia, to develop a methodology for ballistic testing which could prove useful with a view to the forthcoming review conference to be held in 2001. I would like to draw the attention of delegates present here to the fact that our invitation, which was recently communicated to the missions in Geneva, was also sent to their capitals through Swiss diplomatic channels. It remains for us to hope that international awareness will emerge in order to limit and protect civilian populations as well as soldiers of present and future generations from needless suffering inflicted by such weapons systems. To this end I can only endorse the thoughts expressed by the State Secretary of Norway, Mrs. Aaslaug Haga, who made a statement before this Conference last Thursday, and for whom the question of conventional weapons remains one of her major concerns.

As was stated by the State Secretary, I should like to draw the attention of all delegations, members and observers alike, to Mozambique's invitation to the informal meeting that will take place next Monday, 1 March, to prepare for the Maputo Conference on the Ottawa Convention. This Conference, mentioned this morning by Ambassador Kreid, will place particular emphasis on action against mines, mine clearance and assistance to mine victims. To this end all States have been invited to participate by the United Nations Secretary-General, who is the depositary of the convention. In this way, with a view to next Monday's informal meeting, all the missions in Geneva have received from Mozambique a complete set of documents and a detailed programme.

To conclude, Switzerland also considers that the question of weapons of mass destruction remains a priority issue in disarmament and arms control efforts. Though their destructive effects are not directly felt, their destructive potential nonetheless constitutes a grave threat to international peace and security. Hence it is high time for our institution to get back down to work and to begin substantive negotiations on this issue, on the basis of the progress accomplished at the last session of the Conference on Disarmament.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Switzerland for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would now like to call on the representative of Bulgaria, Ambassador Draganov.

Mr. DRAGANOV (Bulgaria): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the CD and assure you of my delegation's full support in the exercise of your demanding duties. I would also like to express my gratitude for the good work done by your predecessors, Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States and Ambassador Ian Soutar of the United Kingdom, to lead this Conference on a constructive track. Our tribute also goes to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference, and his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, as well as to the secretariat, for their professionalism and competent cooperation.

Let me use the occasion to welcome all our new colleagues who have recently joined the Conference and to bid farewell to our outgoing distinguished colleague from France, Ambassador Joëlle Bourgois, with whom I have had the special privilege of working together in the same diplomatic corps twice in a row now. I wish her good health and success in all her future endeavours. My best wishes also go to Ambassador John Campbell, with whom I was particularly honoured to work as officially part of the company of the representatives listed below.

I have asked for the floor to make a statement relating to anti-personnel landmines (APLs) on behalf of Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States and Venezuela.

These States consider that the Conference on Disarmament has a clear mandate to address conventional disarmament issues. As part of this mandate, we believe the CD has a role to play in strengthening the existing international regime against anti-personnel landmines. This would involve the negotiation of a ban on the transfer of APLs, as a complement to existing international agreements on APLs. There is an expectation that the CD will undertake this work, as evidenced by the strong support accorded to United Nations General Assembly resolution 52/38 H, which invites the CD to intensify its efforts on APLs.

It is with great pleasure that we note the entry into force of amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons or the CCW and the imminent entry into force of the Ottawa Convention. These instruments represent major achievements. However, many historical users, producers and exporters of APLs who are also members of the CD are for the moment not in a position to accede to the Ottawa Convention or the CCW. An APL transfer ban negotiated by the entire CD membership would therefore bring these countries at least some of the way towards the goal of a total APL ban, and in due course encourage increased participation in existing international instruments. It would moreover play an important role in stemming the supply of APLs, by significantly reducing the availability of these weapons, which

(Mr. Draganov, Bulgaria)

continue to have tragic humanitarian consequences in many regions of the world. The task of implementing a global regime against landmines would be enhanced if we pursued a transfer ban within the CD.

We believe negotiation of a transfer ban in the CD would have a number of compelling advantages. It would, from the beginning, cover all types of anti-personnel landmines. Such negotiations would also involve, from the outset, the relevant States not yet party to the Ottawa Convention or the CCW. These negotiations would, we believe, represent another irreversible step forward in the universalization of the global fight against landmines. A further advantage of the CD negotiating a transfer ban is that it has the capacity to get down to work on this issue immediately, and achieve an expeditious completion of the negotiations.

According to the proposals currently before the Conference, a consensus exists in favour of the reappointment of a CD Special Coordinator on APLs. On this basis, the CD should move quickly to capitalize on the consensus and reappoint a Special Coordinator to carry forward the work on this important issue, with a view to the early establishment of an ad hoc committee, given the broad support demonstrated within the CD for that course of action.

A document containing the views of the countries mentioned above will be submitted to the secretariat for issuance as an official document of the Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Bulgaria for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would like now to call on the representative of France, Ambassador Bourgois.

Mrs. BOURGOIS (France) (translated from Spanish): Thank you very much for your kind words, Mr. President. Allow me to extend to you my best wishes for success in your difficult task.

(continued in French)

You are taking the Chair of our Conference at a crucial moment. The adoption of the programme of work seems to be still beyond reach. However, there has already been enough crossing of swords on various sides to ensure that no one can have the impression of having sacrificed a national position for the sake of objectives dictated by others. Soon the need for action should lead all of us to resign ourselves to what is possible. On the table is the plat de résistance: the FMCT negotiations. It is an unappetizing dish. Some find it a meagre offering. The others are afraid of choking on it. No one wants to try it. Hence it is the ideal recipe for the Conference on Disarmament, which differs completely in that respect from the most renowned restaurants. The accompaniment to this plat de résistance is familiar: security assurances, preferably prepared by an internationally famous chef, the Ambassador of Mexico. Add a teaspoonful of discussion on the other nuclear disarmament issues and a soupçon of outer space, to please the Ambassador of the United States of America. Sprinkle with some anti-personnel mines. Cook on a very low heat.

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

But I am straying from my purpose today, which is not to sit down to a meal with you but to say my farewells. Farewell to my colleagues, from the oldest to the new arrivals. The old ones have become friends - I might even say accomplices. The new wave has brought with it promises of friendship which will be realized one day or another. Farewell to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament. I have appreciated the fact that he is always available in case of need, as well as his discretion and his prudence on matters with which he is more familiar than any of us. We are indebted to him in part for the fact that our body has remained in Geneva and has been strengthened.

My thanks also to the Deputy Secretary-General, Abdelkader Bensmail, who draws his thorough knowledge of the workings of this body from the many years he has spent in it. I also thank the efficient United Nations press service run by Thérèse Gastaut with an iron hand in a velvet glove. Thanks to our interpreters for their dedication and their faithful presence at hectic moments. Special thanks to those who translate from French into the other languages of the Conference, and particularly into that international Esperanto which used to be British English. My friend the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, who is perfectly at home in French, could testify better than me to its hidden pitfalls. In a best-seller written by one of his compatriots, Peter Mayle, on Provence, I learned of the mental gymnastics imposed on our interpreters by an allegedly logical language:

> "Where is the logic, for instance, in the genders given to proper names and nouns? Why is the Rhone masculine and the Durance feminine? They are both rivers, and if they must have a sex, why can't it be the same one? ... Strange and unnatural events take place every day within the formalities of French syntax. A recent newspaper article, reporting on the marriage of the rock singer Johnny Halliday, paused in its description of the bride's frock to give Johnny a pat on the back. 'Il est', said the article, 'une grande vedette'. In the space of a single short sentence, the star had undergone a sex change, and on his wedding day too."

My thanks to the often invisible but always efficient staff of the secretariat. Thanks to the conference room staff who observe us without appearing to see us and who know how to look the other way when someone, myself in particular, behaves in a way at variance with the rules or customs.

I dare say this profusion of thanks will demonstrate to you that this departure - such an ordinary event in a diplomatic career - has a melancholy tinge. Certainly I would not have imagined three and a half years ago that I would miss more about the Palais des Nations than its correspondence to the descriptions of Albert Cohen in Belle du Seigneur; the dark and gilded frescoes of José María Sert, whose sombreness and violence evoked for me by way of ironic contrast the role his wife Misia was playing at that same moment in Paris life during the roaring twenties; and of course the sense of history conveyed without fail when one sat in the Council Chamber of the League of Nations.

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

In September 1995, the CTBT negotiations were at their height. France was doing all it could to speed up progress by completing its last series of nuclear tests. Far from acknowledging this move, however, my colleagues showered me with reproaches. They did so in a language in which I was not at home. It was not any of the working languages or official languages of the Conference. It was an idiom full of mysterious acronyms: PTBT, CTBT, CWC, SSOD-1, IMS, IDC, GSE, NTM, SBSSP, etc. An idiom riddled with pitfalls: PNE, zero yield, OSI, red light, green light, etc. But if the details were beyond me, the general thrust of it was clear. I represented a country in the wrong. As if a country could be in the wrong.

And moreover I was not a member of the club. I had come from a country, South Africa, which was not yet a member of the Conference on Disarmament. I was unknown to the battalion of strategists who exchanged signs of recognition between them: Vienna 1992, New York 1995. I was not on the lists of the PPNN, who did not yet invite me to their meetings. And when I left Geneva for New York and thought I would avoid the crossfire of Antonio de Icaza, Munir Zahran, Munir Akram, Mark Moher - to mention only those who are present here - I found myself on the other side of the Atlantic faced with resolution 50/70 A and Richard Butler.

There were, it is true, groups of the like-minded, the Fifteen, the P3, the P5, the Western group, sometimes known as the Barton Group or the Mason Group. But I would often have preferred the splendid isolation of the "group of one" to the solicitude of my friends. By chance, a very exclusive club which was not registered either in Geneva or in New York had allowed me to join. At the time, China, India and Mexico were members. It was the smokers' club, thanks to which, flying in the face of political correctness, I survived those difficult days. Not without forfeiting the sympathy of my neighbours, I admit. Wolfgang Hoffman did not have the kindly generosity of his successor, the German Ambassador Günther Seibert, who has the same opinion but suffers in silence. Today, even that small group has broken up as a result of the courtesy of Ambassador Changhe Li, the wisdom of Ambassador Savitri Kunadi and the prudence of Ambassador Antonio de Icaza. I therefore made sure that the French Government appointed as my successor an enthusiast not for a nuclear-weapon-free world, not yet, but for a smoke-free world.

Over these past three and a half years of intensive work (1995-1996), pause and reflection (1997), and painful gestation of a decision - the launching of the negotiations on a fissile material production ban, I have seen many faces of the Conference on Disarmament. France, after taking up its seat here, has for years been upholding the role, the competence, the specificity of the sole multilateral forum for negotiations in the field of disarmament. My personal experience, brief as it has been, leads me to think that if the Conference did not exist, it would have to be invented. Why?

Some believe that the Conference on Disarmament lost the reason for its existence with the end of the cold war. In 1995 we could still try to understand that type of theory. But was it not a form of Eurocentrism? The prevailing idea was that once the European continent had been reconciled, and the two largest Powers engaged in a strategic partnership, the world would

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

only have to gather up the peace dividend. However, the Middle East question has still not been settled. The nuclear tests carried out by India and then Pakistan have radically modified the picture in Asia. The arms race has shifted from the nuclear sphere to that of ballistic missiles. Africa, which is bristling with mines, is devastated by the misuse of small arms, a scourge in other regions of the world, too, including the all-too-close Balkans. The modifications in the ABM Treaty introduced by the United States and Russia have led many of us to question the soundness of the framework within which we are working here to construct legal tools for disarmament.

True, we have neither the power nor the ambition to address all these issues. But if international legislation on nuclear armament and conventional weapons is to be drawn up, in an attempt to safeguard humanity against the devastating effects of real or potential conflicts, where can that be done, if not here? The Conference, expanded from 37 members to 60, is certainly not universal. I acknowledge this all the more readily as France has always supported its expansion. But all the protagonists of the emerging world are gathered here: the North, the South, the East, the West, the nuclear Powers, the non-nuclear-weapon States, the Arab world, including Iraq, and Israel; NPT member States and non-members; the Ottawa signatories and the non-signatories; those who have signed the CTBT and those who have not yet done so. Involving the observers in the negotiations, securing United Nations General Assembly endorsement for those negotiations, help to reconcile representativeness and universality.

Some consider that consensus, which governs our work, is a source of inefficiency, and that it is the shadow cast by the veto. What if it is? What could be more democratic than a forum in which a super-Power - a "hyper-Power", as the French Minister for Foreign Affairs now calls it, by analogy with the hypermarkets which have dethroned the supermarkets in the sphere of mass retailing - can block a decision? But also a forum in which a country lacking the attributes of power can deny a bigger country the right to tackle an issue which is important to it. I have in mind, for example, space, on the one hand, or anti-personnel mines on the other. What, ultimately, would be the benefit of coercion by the majority? None of the States we represent is forced to sign any treaty. None is forced to ratify a treaty after signing it. Consensus is therefore the sole guarantee of the validity of an international agreement in an area of vital interest for States - that of their security.

The pool of expertise constituted by ourselves, our delegations, the experts on whom we can call, the secretariat, and UNIDIR, under the extraordinarily dynamic leadership of that exceptional pair, Patricia Lewis and Christophe Carle, is underestimated, belittled - in most cases, in fact, by the authorities of the countries we represent, a measure of how hard the diplomat's task is nowadays. It is true that the Ottawa Process displayed the suddenness and speed of an avalanche. I am proud of having supported it to the best of my ability because, as I said in Oslo at the closing of the negotiations, that Convention will stand as a symbol - a symbol of those moments in international life where reasons of State coincide with popular sentiment. But, if we were able to accept the illusion of getting to grips

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

with the issue of anti-personnel mines without excessive difficulty, what about nuclear testing? Or the production of fissile material? Or biological weapons? In this very forum I have witnessed redoubtable presentations concerning the energy released by a nuclear explosion. Some of us - and if he had not left me in the lurch today, I might have called on the services of the Ambassador of Egypt, who constitutes something of a communal memory for us all - some of us remember the demonstrations provided by Grigori Berdennikov during the final phase of the CTBT negotiations. There was no time at that stage to call on experts for help. We had to try to understand in order to provide support or to counter-attack. According to a French saying, war is too serious a matter to be left to generals. I would say that peace is too serious to be entrusted to technicians. Let us be our own experts.

Some consider that the permanent nature of the organization is the source of unacceptable waste at a time when budgetary austerity is being imposed on all countries and at a stage in our economic history which is haunted by the spectre of crisis and unemployment among both poor and rich. It is true that the repetition of certain arguments ad nauseam on all sides adds nothing to the debate. It is true that the lack of continuity in the programme of work from one year to the next gives us the feeling that time is being wasted. But close contact between minds and characters is ultimately a productive factor. It imposes mutual respect. It compels understanding. It forces us to observe certain rules: never take your partner or group by surprise, especially with a good idea; keep a prudent balance between limited consultations and transparency.

I recall the draft nuclear test-ban treaty prepared by the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee, Ambassador Jaap Ramaker of the Netherlands, after taking endless precautions and holding countless discussions, and placed before the Conference on 28 May 1996. Ambassador Akram, who had his reasons for doing so, said that it had "descended from heaven", which coming from him was no compliment, at least that day. I remember my friend the Ambassador of India, Arundati Ghose, denouncing with matchless skill the "hall with trick mirrors" in which we were all moving, with her in first place. Conversely, I was bewildered by a number of compliments to my "sincerity", my "honesty", my "clarity", my "Cartesian spirit". I was very elegantly accused of the negotiator's worst professional failing - frankness. Overall, however, this daily contact between minds and characters fosters compromise and allows complex negotiations to reach a conclusion. Whatever the political differences and technical difficulties involved in verifying the ban on biological weapons, matters would progress faster if the ad hoc group was a standing body instead of meeting sporadically. Some may be pleased that the situation is not arranged in that way. Others, including my country, may deplore it. That is how things are.

In this forum, the international community has a tool for dialogue. The existence of the Conference on Disarmament is in itself a confidence-building measure which nothing could replace. Let us not accuse the institution of defects or shortcomings which are in fact our own. Conversely, let us not feel guilty at a lack of political will or a degree of indifference on the part of NGOs and the media - who are in fact our most valuable source of help

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

and to whom I wish to pay tribute - regarding certain issues which, in our view, are of fundamental importance. The production of fissile material for nuclear weapons is less meaningful to the man in the street than explosions are. Yet it constitutes the heart of the issue, in every sense of the term. The militarization of space is not a matter for much concern, except to science fiction writers, on the eve of the next millennium. Yet it is a dream that could become a nightmare. In short, let us keep the Conference on Disarmament as a tool and let us remember at the same time that, as we say in my country, "The most beautiful girl in the world can only offer what she has".

I can see that I have let myself get carried away. I was unable to avoid the trap. Those who urged me to revive a tradition that had fallen into disuse, the farewell speech, did so in a spirit of friendship which was certainly tinged with mischief. And I have just provided them with a final proof of my naivety. It is of no importance. Without realizing it, without intending to, I have found myself expressing what a philosopher in the age of the Enlightenment, Montesquieu, called the general spirit of a nation. France prefers "straight talking" to what is "politically correct". Geographically, it belongs to the North, but its heart draws it to the South. It has friends, it has allies, but it grants no Power and no group the right to dictate its conduct. It favours a multipolar world, which it views as a better guarantee of politico-strategic balance and cultural pluralism. It likes to challenge conventional ideas. It mistrusts prejudices, even its own. This esprit francais was defined by one of our colleagues, better known for his literary works than for his achievements in the field of diplomacy, Jean Giraudoux, in a play, L'impromptu de Paris, in 1938. I will leave with you the fruit of his reflection: "Excuse my mirth when I hear it proclaimed that France's destiny is to be the instrument of restraint and level-headedness on Earth! France's destiny is to unsettle the world". Unsettling the established order often offers the best promise of progress.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of France for her statement and the kind words she addressed to the Chair.

The informal consultations we held on Tuesday in this room enabled us to make a little more progress in the process of adoption of our programme of work by identifying with greater clarity the areas, the spaces for agreement and the points on which the required consensus has not yet been attained. We have been able to observe the desire of one and all to show the greatest flexibility, which is essential for the adoption of our programme. But I have to say that serious additional efforts are required to reach our goal. In the next few days I intend to continue my efforts in the search for solutions acceptable to all on the two items which, as we all know, have not been settled: nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which will enable us finally to get down to substantive consideration of our work. In this regard I hope to secure some results which I will submit to you in due course.

Before adjourning this meeting I must inform you that as a consequence of Zimbabwe's decision not to occupy the Chair during the period from 24 May

(The President)

to 20 June 1999, in conformity with rule 9 of our rules of procedure, the presidency of the Conference for the rest of the session will be occupied as follows: Viet Nam from 15 March to 23 May; Algeria from 24 May to 20 June; Argentina from 21 June to 15 August; and Australia from 16 August to 31 December 1999.

Does any delegation wish to speak? If not, I propose to adjourn the meeting and point out that the next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 4 March at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.